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SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR EUR/CE AND EUR/SCE

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SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR'S FAREWELL CALLS: U.S.-EUROPEAN
PARTNERSHIP, CROATIA AND THE WESTERN BALKANS

REF: A. LJUBLJANA 10

1B. LJUBLJANA 16

Classified By: CDA Brad Freden, reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

1. (C) SUMMARY. In farewell calls on Slovenian President Daniel Turk and National Assembly speaker Pavel Gantar, Ambassador Ghafari highlighted the importance of U.S.-European partnership; stressed the need for prompt parliamentary ratification of Croatia's membership in NATO; and urged Slovenia to do its part to reach a bilateral agreement with Croatia that would allow Croatia's EU accession negotiations to move forward. His interlocutors were optimistic about the NATO vote, with Turk saying he would be prepared to address parliament in support of Croatia's NATO membership when the issue comes to a vote at the end of the month. Gantar said that Slovenia "has no intention to transfer the border question (with Croatia) to the EU, but cannot accept the inclusion of documents that pre-judge the outcome of that dispute." Turk stressed that it was important for the U.S. and Slovenia to continue their cooperation in the Western Balkans, and made a pitch for active engagement in the region by the incoming administration. END SUMMARY.

12. (C) Ambassador Ghafari made farewell calls January 19 on President Turk and parliamentary speaker Gantar. He called previously on Prime Minister Pahor and Foreign Minister Zbogar (reftels). Turk referred to Europe's "many hopes and expectations" for the incoming Obama administration, noting the opportunity it presented for Europe and the U.S. to "update their definition of the trans-Atlantic partnership" at the next U.S.-EU summit. Turk agreed with the Ambassador's realistic assessment regarding the extent of -- and time line for -- change in U.S. policy. (N.B. In a subsequent statement publicly welcoming President Obama's inauguration, Turk said, "our expectations must be developed within an appropriate time frame; work on problems which the United States and the world are facing will require several years. . . . results are not to be expected in a month or two.") The Slovenian president tactfully implied that he would like to meet President Obama, saying that Slovenia was interested in "appropriate bilateral contacts" in the future.

13. (C) On Croatia, Turk and Gantar assured the Ambassador that there was support in the National Assembly for ratification of the NATO protocol. The largest opposition party, former PM Janez Jansa's SDS, understands the importance of having Croatia in NATO, Turk said. He added that he would address the National Assembly himself in support of ratification if it appeared that the vote was going to be close. Gantar told the Ambassador, "we already

have the 2/3 majority." This was, however, before the advisory upper house of parliament voted to postpone the NATO vote until spring. Both men drew a clear line first between NATO accession and EU accession, and then between resolution of the larger border-demarcation dispute and the immediate issue of the maps and documents submitted by Croatia as part of the accession process. "Slovenia wants Croatia to enter the European Union," Gantar said, adding that it "has no intention of transferring the border question to the EU." Turk took the Ambassador's point about the importance of Croatia's EU accession, but said that recent public statements from Zagreb did not help. "Our reactions have been very careful," Turk asserted. (N.B. Both sides seem to have been watching their words in the last week.)

¶4. (C) Turk described as excellent the cooperation between the U.S. and Slovenia in the wider Western Balkan region, but noted the unfinished business in Bosnia-Herzegovina and Kosovo. "The U.S. presence in the region since the mid 1990s has been useful," he said; "I hope it will continue under the new administration." The Ambassador praised Slovenia's ability to maintain good relations with both Belgrade and Pristina, as well as the stabilizing influence of Slovenian government, commercial and NGO activity throughout the former Yugoslavia and Albania.

¶5. (SBU) Turk began and ended the discussion by praising Ambassador Ghafari's accomplishments during his relatively brief tenure in Ljubljana, singling out in particular the Ambassador's impact on public perceptions of the United States. Referring to the Ambassador's immigrant roots, Turk

LJUBLJANA 00000021 002 OF 002

asserted that his life story reflected the value Americans place on openness, open-mindedness, optimism, and hard work. He added that having Arab-Americans in prominent positions "sends an important message about the U.S."

¶6. (U) COMMENT. As both a diplomat and a leader of this Mission, Ambassador Ghafari personified the finest traditions of American diplomacy: vision, humility, patience, respect for all, and dedication to service. He did not have the opportunity to approve this message before permanently departing Post on January 20, 2009. END COMMENT.

FREDEN